

KYUK loses Yup'ik news director

by Geoff Kennedy

for the Tundra Times

BETHEL — Alaska is losing its only Yup'ik television news anchor.

Kakianeq (Adolph Lewis) is resigning his position as Yup'ik news director at KYUK, the Bethel public radio and television station.

His resignation jeopardizes the future of Native-language radio and television news in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta, according to Rhonda McBride, KYUK news director.

Kakianeq cites the stress of having co-workers expect too much from him.

"Especially for someone who isn't trying to be a reporter," Kakianeq said. Colleagues frequently expect him to have all the skills of a reporter and to work as fast as one, he said.

"Right now, I don't want to consider myself a news reporter, but an

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interpreter," he said. Interpreters do more than translate word for word, they adapt messages to the language and culture, he said.

"If I translated word for word, I'd just be speaking mumbo-jumbo," he said. "There are words in English that don't translate into Yup'ik."

The lack of help from fellow Yup'iks also prompted his decision, Kakianeq said. Having to interpret news reports and read them in Yup'ik with no help from others, both at noon and in the evening, put undue pressure on him, he said.

"I was being stressed out," he said. "I was mad at everybody, yelling and screaming."

Although he recognizes the importance of preserving the culture by working with elders and enjoys interacting with them, he expressed feelings of discomfort when interviewing them.

"My elders say, 'Look at the person's mouth when speaking; otherwise, you won't retain the message.'"

"But I've learned to establish eye contact when speaking to others. I pay Western-type attention when speaking to Yup'iks. I stare at them too hard and make them self-conscious. My mind is in two modes: Western and Yup'ik."

"I still get really confused at how to present myself to elders. Should I sit close to them, look at them eye to eye or just sit without looking at them?"

"I get frustrated with myself. Sometimes I wonder if I'm more *kass'ag*-ized than I think I am. When interviewing Yup'iks, I often interrupt them before they finish what they're saying."

"I have to learn not to interrupt. My best friend tells me I've been brainwashed by KYUK. I get criticized for being too Westernized. But I see myself as Eskimo, not *Kass-kimo*."

But the job has brought him a number of satisfactions as well, Kakianeq said.

He gets a lot of satisfaction interpreting news events for Native elders.

He also enjoys the opportunity to serve as a positive role model for young people.

"I'm sending an important message to keep our culture rather than being *kass'ag*-ized," he said. Even so, he said, when he goes back to his home village, Kwigillingok, he gets criticized for behaving too much like a *kass'ag*.

He enjoys being able to interact with a lot of people. He finds it interesting to become acquainted with politicians, administrators and health professionals, he said.

Kakianeq's departure leaves KYUK with some "tough decisions," McBride said.

She offers eight alternatives: canceling television news, canceling only the Yup'ik portion of television news, filling the 30-minute television newscasts with English news only, inserting some Yup'ik translation into the newscast, transforming Yup'ik news into a Yup'ik cultural segment, inserting a six-minute cultural segment into the newscast, keeping the current system of dividing the half hour into equal Yup'ik and English segments or depending on volunteers to produce the Yup'ik television news.

Recruiting Yup'iks and keeping them at KYUK has been a "constant battle," said General Manager John McDonald.

"Anyone talented enough to work in journalism can get more pay in other agencies like the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corp. or the college," he said.

"In addition, many Yup'iks have a hard time with an eight-hour day and different work standards. They tend to want big chunks of time off for traditional activities, such as berrypicking, getting a moose, egg-hunting and commercial and subsistence fishing," he said.

"We try to give them as much flexibility as we can to accommodate them, but they miss those activities. When people don't get enough leave time for those activities, it just grinds on them."

"We just have to adapt to people or face a high turnover. It's hard to hold a full-time Yup'ik," McDonald said.

"But reporting jobs are even more stressful. They don't like reporting on each other, digging and doing the things reporters like to do. They don't like to pry and be nosy."

Yet, dropping Yup'ik news "sends out a bad message," McBride said. "At a time when educators and Native leaders are calling for an all-out effort to save the language to save the culture, this would be yet another example of the white culture stream-rolling the local Native culture."